RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 7th December, 1993/
16 *Agrahayana,* 1915 *(Saka)*

The House met at Eleven of the clock.

The Deputy Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Proposal to give telephone exchanges of Karnataka and Gujarat to Private Sector on lease

*61. SHRI J. P. JAVALI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a proposal to give some exchanges of the Department of Telecommunications in Karnataka and Gujarat on. lease to the private sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether one of the Exchanges in Hubli, which has Cross Bar equipment is also under consideration for being given on lease?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No,, Sir.

SHRI J. P. JAVALI: Madam Deputy Chairman, to my questions the Minister has given a standard reply, "(a) No, Sir, (b) Does not article and (c) No. Sir." Some people call it a substandard reply. This matter had appeared in the press widely. Some workers of the Telecommunication Department have complained that some exchanges are being given on lease to the private sector without the matter being considered either by the Cabinet Committee or by both the Houses of Parliament.

My question pertains to the Cross Bar Exchange at Hubli also. There are many complaints about the functioning of the telephone lines at Hubli. In this connection, there have been agitations. A big *dharna,* a big *morcha,* was staged by very responsible persons of Hubli. The Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Rotary Club, the Lions' Club and other organisations have also complained against the non-functioning of telephones in Hubli. Either they go dead or get the wrong numbers often on dialling. This is because of the fact that in Hubli there is a Cross Bar Exchange which is outdated. And there is another equipment of 4000 lines in Hubli. This was the last of the equipments which was manufactured at Manakpur. This equipment has been discarded elsewhere whereas it has been installed in Hubli in 1991. Also there is one equipment called the Strowger in Hubli of 6000 lines which was installed in 1964. It is 29 years old.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN; What is your question?

SHRI J. P. JAVALI: I am coming to my question. Because of these two equipments which are outmoded, out dated, obsolete and over-aged the tel ephones are not working. In this connection I also wrote several letters to the Minister but I regret to say that I have not received any reply. Therefore, I have posed this question. May I know from the Minister whe ther he is going to replace these equi-ments and install the latest E-10 B electronic equipment or any modern equipment, electronic exchange of 10,000 lines at Hubli.

उपसभापति : इधर कम्युनिकेशन का गैप हो गया है शायद ।

SHRI SUKH RAM: I will try to bridge the gap.

My replies are based on facts. They are not sub-standard. As far as part (a) of his question is concerned, there are certain proposals by the private companies for providing basic services in certain parts of Gujarat and

Tamil Nadu. They are under examination. But it is a major decision to which extent private sector has to be involved in basic services. And, this matter has been referred to the Cabinet. Only when the Cabinet takes a final decision, we will come to know of the view of the Cabinet on this matter.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Hon. Minister, that means there is a proposal. In your written reply, you have denied the proposal.

SHRI SUKH RAM: The question is such that you can interpret it either way. The question reads, "Whether it is a fact that there is a proposal to give some Exchanges of the Department of Telecommunications in Karnataka and Gujarat on lease to the private sector;". It can be interpreted as to mean asking whether there is a proposal by the Department of Telecommunications to give on a lease basis some of the Excahnges. On this interpretation, my reply is that there is no such proposal by the Department of Telecommunications to give any Exchange to private parties. That is the reply to part (a) of the question.

As far as the Hubli Exchange is concerned, I shall definitely look into it. We have taken a policy decision that all the Electro-Mechanical Ex changes have to be replaced by Elec tronic Exchanges. But there is the financial implication also. We need Rs. 1500-2000 crores in order to re place them. So old Exchanges where there are a number of complaints have to be replaced first. If what the hon. Member says about the Hubli Exchange is true, certainly I will look into it and, if possible, I will try to see that that Exchange is replaced. But then, the whole issue has to be examined.

SHRI J. P. JAVAI.I-. I understand that there has been a long waiting list for a very long time at Hubli. There is a demand for a new Exchange with an additional 10,000 lines. Would the Minister consider it and sanction it?

SHRI SUKH RAM; Yes, there ie demand everywhere and there are more than three million people on the waiting lists and there may be a long list in Hubli also. I shall try to see whether additional capacitycan be installed there. I wil examine that issue.

SHRI H. HANUMANTHAPPA-Madam, the anxiety of the Member in asking whether you are going private may be because of the experience in air travel. After the introduction of the private air-taxi system, courteousness has entered into Indian Airlines, etc Maybe with that anxiety he asked the question. My understanding is that by Members raising parliamentary questions, the Minister will look into them and the Ministry will also look into them. The Minister assures, "I will look into it", but the Ministry is not looking into it. Madam, you may remember, six months ago, I raised a question. I have two telephones on my table at my residence in Cbit-radurga, just adjacent to Mr Javali. There is no communication between the two telephones. I raised this question. The Minister said, "i will look into it". But the Ministry is not looking into it. How to make the Ministry look into it? Parliament questions should be purposeful and useful. when the Minister says, "I will look into it", the Ministry should also take note of it. I request the Minister to not only look into it personally, but also make the Ministry look into it.

SHRI SUKH RAM: Madam, when I make a commitment here, in this House. I am in charge of the entire Ministry and the Ministry is bound to look into it when 1 say here that... *(Interruptions)...*

SHRI H. HANUMANTHAPPA: He will look into my telephone tomorrow!

SHRI SUKH RAM: I am sorry hon. Member, I think there are 8.3 million telephones in this country. You cannot expect... *(Interruptions)...*

SHRI H. HANUMANTHAPPA: How many of them are working?

SHRIMATI JAYANTHl NATARA-JAN: None of them ever works

SHRI SUKH RAM; You cannot ex pect a Minister to remember how many telephones are working and how many telephones are out of order. So, *it* you...*(Interruptions)*...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, please... *(Interruptions)* . . . I will call you if you have a question . . . *(Interruptions)* .. .Please sit down.

SHRI SUKH RAM. But I assure the hon. Member, since I have great regard for the Members of this House, I will see to it that your two telephones—about which you might have mentioned—function properly. If the telephones of the hon. Members do not function, how can we function in this country? That, I have to see^

SHRI SOMAPPA R. BOMMAI: Madam Deputy Chairman, the Minister was good enough to give us an assurance. I would like to bring to the notice of the Minister that Hubli is the second largest city in Karna-taka and it has got a railway workshop and it is a business centre, the biggest business centre, and I was told that an electronic exchange was allotted to Hubli but it was shifted to another place because of pressure on the Ministry Now we have received complaints from the Chamber of Commerce from the public and other consumer associations. I have forwarded those representations to you along with the representations from five M.Ps coming from that city. All of us jointly wrote. Recently I have written a letter to you in which I mentioned that one of the leading members of the Chamber of Commerce has complained that he has got bills for calls which he has never made Some people were talking to New York and London for which the has to pay. He never talked. He complained about it. Now his telephone has been cut. He has to pay even when he hag not talked, even when he has not communicated. Such a mess is there in this Hubli town. I am particularly interested in my home town. I represented the city five times in the Assembly. That is not the reason, but the main thing is, that is the second biggest eity. When are you going to give an electronic exchange to it? (Interruptions) ...

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: As a Chief Minister, you did not do anything.

SHRI SOMAPPA R BOMMAI: Madam, just to tell my friend, Swamyji, 1 wrote.. ..

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You do not have to answer Mr. Swamy and... *(Interruptions)* ...

SHRI SOMAPPA R. BOMMAI; As a Minister and Chief Minister, I had written to the Ministry umpteen times

SHRI SUKH RAM; Madam, I have already assured this House that I will definitely look into this matter, and if possible, I assure the hon. Member not only replacement of this electro-mechanical exchange with an electronic exchange but if possible, I will try to add additional capacity to this large digital system, the latest technology which has got the ISD facility.

SHRI S JAIPAL REDDY. You place Hubli on the political map of India. You are not doing justice to Hubli. It should be a prominent place on the political map of India.

SHRI SUKH RAM: I will see to it that whatever is possible is done.

SHRI GOPALSINH G SOLANKI: Madam, it has become a prominent system of administration to shift the old machinery of an old exchange from one place to another and go in for an electronic exchange. la the

same fashion the exchange in Godhra in Panch Mahals District of Gujarat has become very old. It has been working since 1952 and a new-exchange was planned by the Tele phone Department, but for the last so many years we do not find any prog ress. With a view to satisfy the requirements of the people in Guj arat they have just replaced the 1,000 C-DoT exchnage and provided telephone connections, but the wait ing list of Gujarat State has mounted to 2,41,000 odd. In the same manner, Kerala is also having a very big waiting list. Kar-nataka is having around 2 lakhs. May I know from the Minister, when they are considering leasing of exchanges to private parties, in what fashion they are going to meet the particular demands of the people of these States?

SHRI SUKH RAM: Madam, as I stated earlier, our policy is to replace all the electro-mechanical exchanges with electronic exchanges. But the question is about its financial implications because we need about Rs. 1,500 crores to Rs. 2,000 crores for their replacements. So, in course of time, as and when we get the financial support we will achieve this objective. But ^ far as bis question of leasing is concerned, there are proposal's and they are under consideration of the Government. As I stated earlier, when a decision is taken by the Cabinet we will definitely let him know about it. There is a long waiting list everywhere, in everytown. There are more than 3 million people on the waiting list. Now our attempt during the Eighth Five Year Plan is that the people should not wait for more than 2 years in cities and we will make the telephone available *on* demand as far as the rural areas are concerned. Then there is the financial problem. During the Eighth Five Year Plan for installation of about 75 lakh telephone lines in this country we need more than Rs. 40,000 crores, against which an allocation of Rs. 25,000 crores has been made. There is a substantial shortfall. We feel that we have to go in a *big* way. On the one hand we are losing revenue and, on the other hand, our economic growth is affected. Now there is a question if we should attract resources from the private .sector also so that they can suppplement the efforts of the DoT and MTNL. I think this whole issue is under the consideration of the Government and as and when a decision is taken, some additional resources will be generated and we can get some money from other sources also. We are trying our level best. There are some constraints.

Telecasting Rights for Hero Cup Tournament

*62. SHRI MOHD. KHALEELUR RAHMAN :†

SHRI CHIMANBHAI MEHTA;

Will the Minister of INFORMA TION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state.

(a) whether it is a fact that the Cricket Association of Bengal sold

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Mohd. Khaleelur Rahman.